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## THE IRISH QUESTION IN A NEW LIGHT.

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A REMARKABLE change has taken place in the Irish situation. In the first zeal of his conversion to Home Rule, Mr. Gladstone declared that the whole civilized world was on his side ; and he could, at any rate, count upon the enthusiastic endorsement of his policy by American public opinion. A week or two ago there was widely circulated in the American press an obituary notice from the pen of no less distinguished an observer of current events than Professor Goldwin Smith, who has satisfied himself that Home Rule is dead !

Be this as it may—and for my part I do not go so far as the eminent historian—the once burning Irish question no longer attracts audiences, or dollars, in the United States. Nevertheless, no greater mistake could be made than to suppose that the American nation has finally cast off its Irish sympathies. There is too much Irish blood flowing through its veins to allow it to forget Ireland while many of her people remain in poverty and discontent. For these Irish sympathizers, even if Home Rule were dead, the Irish question would remain. But it will be approached in a calmer and more helpful spirit. There is no public opinion in the world which learns more surely from experience than that of the American people. The logic of events has forced many who supported the National movement to the conclusion that there must be something unsound either in the cause itself or in the method of its promotion. And now, practical before all things, the American mind will not readily commit itself again to any definite policy for Ireland, unless it sees clearly whither that policy will lead.

Nor is it only sympathy for Ireland which will keep alive American interest in the condition of her people. The influence of Irish organizations upon the public life of the United States, whether it be for good or for evil, will at any rate be a powerful influence for many years to come. The bond between the Irish in Ireland and the far larger portion of the race which has found its home in the Western hemisphere may in some respects be temporarily loosened. But, in the main, the policy, tone, and temper of these Irish-American organizations will reflect the political, social, and economic situation in Ireland. It is equally true that the situation in Ireland is affected by the influence of public opinion in the United States. There exists, then, a common interest between the readers of the *NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW* and the Irish politician whom its Editor has invited to address them. I am, therefore, glad to tell, and I believe they will be glad to hear, of certain new developments in Ireland which seem to point to better things.

For nearly twenty years I have enjoyed intimate relations with Americans in many States from the Atlantic to the Rockies. In the earlier years of my sojourn among them I found it wiser to avoid the Irish question altogether. Everyone knew so much more about it than I did, and had found a comprehensive and entirely satisfactory solution to the problem which baffled my poor understanding. The main facts upon which their conclusions were based seemed to belong to an Ireland of which I have read, but which ceased to exist some years before I was born. Now, however, American public opinion seems itself to be passing through a period of bewilderment and has returned to its characteristic openmindedness, which the Irish controversy seemed for a while to have disturbed. I have, therefore, no hesitation in submitting to public criticism in America the new Irish movement with which I am associated. In doing so, I shall try to follow the advice of a learned judge, Sir Edward Fry, now presiding over a commission appointed to enquire into the working of the Irish Land Acts, who, in opening the proceedings, appealed to counsel so to present the case from either side as to generate the maximum of light and the minimum of heat.

The policy to be described depends for its success upon the united action, for the common good, of Irishmen politically op-

posed to each other. This may appear to some to be the pious aspiration of a visionary. But those who really understand the Irish character, and know something of Irish history, are aware that the barriers which divide class from class, party from party, and creed from creed, do not exist by virtue of any natural law, and might easily be broken down. The fact is—and I speak from experience—that it is not hard to get people to work together in Ireland if you can only get them to come together. But, until the last year or two, it was regarded as a political necessity to keep men apart. I will briefly summarize, from my own standpoint, the circumstances which have so happily altered the situation.

Many of my American friends, who, in the heyday of Parnell's power, plunged themselves heart and soul into the Irish question, now confess themselves totally incapable of comprehending how differences of opinion among his followers can be allowed to wreck the policy which he had built up. I am glad that I can honestly avow my own utter inability to throw any light upon the subject, or to give any clear definition of the issues which keep asunder the various sections into which this once formidable party is now divided. I am convinced, however, that the present state of confusion in Nationalist ranks has a more deeply seated cause than merely personal disputes. These would be effectively dealt with if there were not "something rotten in the state" of Ireland. The trouble arises from an inherent defect in the Parnell system. During his reign the suffrage was widely extended, and, under other circumstances, the political development of the people would have ensued as a natural consequence. But the paramount influence which the Irish leader exercised over an essentially leader-following people enabled him to enter into a simple compact with the Irish electors, the terms of which he dictated. They were to vote for his nominees, and he was to obtain Home Rule. As a question of tactics, this was probably the best course to pursue. Had Parnell lived, and, above all, had the cause not suffered a blow which, among an extremely moral people, was more fatal to his influence than his demise, Home Rule might at least have been tried. In that event, it may be argued that the undoubted statesmanship of the "Uncrowned King" might have found in autonomy the forces necessary for the rapid political education of the people. Per-

haps, too, he might have used his influence to develop their industrial capacities—a task for which the mere concession of a more democratic franchise did not afford him an opportunity. I consider it fair to state these possibilities, though they do not harmonize with my own ideas of a nation's growth. In any case, speculations of this kind are of mere academic value now. Whatever its merits or defects, the Parnell system was a one-man system, and as such it carried a risk against which it was impossible to insure.

What followed the disappearance of Parnell is well known. The political pendulum swung over the Home Rule allies. A Home Rule bill passed through the House of Commons, and was summarily rejected by the House of Lords. The agitation against the much-abused aristocrats fell flat, and the Liberal Government showed no anxiety to place the issue again before the electors.

When Lord Rosebery took up the reins from the venerable statesman who then retired, he seemed to regard the one-man system as a permanent principle of Irish politics. In a memorable speech he significantly remarked that the next Irish leader was probably being wheeled about in a perambulator. And if our politics really are to blunder along indefinitely in the time-honored rut, I dare say we shall have to wait for any hopeful solution of the Irish question until this infant prodigy has arrived at man's estate.

It may be wondered why an opponent of Home Rule in the accepted sense should not contemplate such a prospect at least with equanimity. The explanation is simple. While I consider that the proposed constitutional change would only aggravate the evils from which we suffer, I do not, on that account, think that nothing should be done. England does not owe us Home Rule; but she does owe us, and would give us if we would only agree upon the need of it, remedial legislation of another kind. She is virtually pledged to a reform by which our local government shall be "put on a broad and popular basis," and she will make a great step in that direction in the coming session of Parliament. Private legislation by which purely local Irish business will be relieved of the expense and inconvenience of transacting it at Westminster, is in contemplation. But there remains a less popular and showy reform which is in my judgment

of surpassing importance, as it goes to the root of Irish poverty. The main purpose of this article is to explain and enlist sympathy with the efforts which are being made to obtain the desired relief.

The principle upon which, under modern conditions, the salvation of Ireland must be sought, becomes more manifest every year. The Irish difficulty has long been rather economic than political, and it is so more than ever to-day. Solve the economic problem, and in the process the Irish people will be so elevated and strengthened that they will be able to solve the political problem for themselves. I am firmly convinced that all future attempts to deal with the Irish question on purely political lines are doomed to share the fate of Irish policies in the past.

The space at my command does not permit me to establish the theoretic soundness of the position I take up. I believe it will commend itself to the judgment of the most of those who read this article. In any case, I must now proceed to describe the steps which are being taken to give practical effect to the views I have enunciated.

In doing this, I am confronted with a great difficulty. I have to speak of events in which I took a leading part, and I have not the circumlocutory ingenuity which would be required to combine in my narrative the advantages of personal experience with the avoidance of the first person singular. I hope I may disarm the criticism of those who would accuse me of egotism by admitting frankly that my own prominence, in the somewhat novel and unconventional proceedings I am about to describe, was due to the possession of a political reputation with which I could afford to play fast and loose; while the credit for any success which has been or may be achieved by the new movement which I helped to initiate, is due to men of infinitely greater capacity who devoted themselves to its promotion.

It was not until the general election of 1895 had, by universal admission, postponed, for some years at any rate, the concession of Home Rule, that the opportunity arose to formulate a definite scheme. In August of that year I promulgated in a letter to the Irish press what, quite sincerely if somewhat grandiloquently, I called "A proposal affecting the general welfare of Ireland." A few extracts from this letter will best explain the general scope and purpose of the scheme. After confessing my continued opposition

to Home Rule because "I did not think it would be good for Ireland," I made the admission "that if the average Irish elector, who is more intelligent than the average British elector, were also as prosperous, as industrious, and as well educated, his continued demand, in the proper constitutional way, for home rule would very likely result in the experiment being one day tried." On the other hand, I gave it as my opinion that "if the material conditions of the great body of our countrymen were advanced, if they were encouraged in industrial enterprise, and were provided with practical education in proportion to their natural intelligence, they would see that a political development on lines similar to those adopted in England was, considering the necessary relations between the two countries, best for Ireland; and then they would cease to desire Home Rule." I then thus suggested a basis for united action between politicians on both sides of the Irish controversy: "We find ourselves still opposed upon the main question, but all anxious to promote the welfare of the country, and confident that, as this is advanced, our respective policies will be confirmed. If, then, it be agreed that it will be good patriotism and good policy alike to work for the material and social advancement of our country, what is to make any of us hesitate to enter at once upon that united action between Irishmen of both parties which alone can produce the desired result?"

The letter proceeded to indicate economic legislation sorely needed by Ireland, and yet quite unobtainable unless it could be removed from the region of controversy. The *modus co-operandi* suggested was as follows: A committee, to sit in the parliamentary recess (whence it came to be known as "The Recess Committee"), was to be formed, consisting, in the first instance, of Irish Members of Parliament nominated by their leaders of the different sections. These nominees should invite to join them any Irishmen whose capacity, knowledge or experience might be of service to the committee, irrespective of the political party or religious persuasion to which they might belong.

I desire, in passing, to emphasize the importance which attaches to this last provision of the scheme. Regarding the Irish question simply from a business point of view—a way of looking at things for which years spent upon the Western plains are accountable—I have always been struck by one very deplorable

feature of Irish public life. Not only the representative men of the classes which have the advantage of wealth and leisure, but also the leaders of our commercial and industrial enterprises, have long been excluded from all influence on the thought and action of the great majority of the people. On the other hand, the actual Irish leaders have rarely been men prominent in any walk of life outside the sphere of politics. I do not wish to be understood as reflecting in any way upon the most representative of my Nationalist fellow-countrymen in pointing out this disadvantage, which I could easily prove, if it were relevant to my argument to do so, to have been in many respects greatly to their credit. My purpose is to show that the Recess Committee was designed to bring about what I consider to be an absolutely necessary combination between the two elements of Irish leadership—the one possessing practical knowledge and commercial experience, the other monopolizing effective influence over the people.

I concluded the letter by broadly commending the scheme to Irish politicians all and sundry. The day had come when “we Unionists, without abating one jot of our Unionism, and Nationalists, without abating one jot of their Nationalism, can each show our faith in the cause for which we have fought so bitterly and so long by sinking our party differences for our country’s good, and leaving our respective policies for the justification of time.”

Needless to say, few besides the author of the proposal were sanguine enough to hope that such a committee would ever be brought together. If that were accomplished some prophesied that its members would but emulate the fame of the Kilkenny cats. A severe blow was dealt to the project at the outset by the refusal of Mr. Justin McCarthy, who then spoke for the largest section of the Nationalist representatives, to have anything to do with it. However, before this decision was officially announced the idea had “caught on.” Public bodies throughout the country endorsed the scheme, and Mr. John Redmond and his followers, who acted in the most conciliatory manner throughout, gave it their adhesion. The parliamentarians then invited prominent men from all quarters, and a committee, which, though informal and self-appointed, might fairly claim to be representative in every material respect, was constituted on the lines laid down.



Truly, it was a strange council over which I now had the honor to preside. All shades of politics were there—Lords Mayo and Monteaule, Mr. Dane and Sir Thomas Lea (Tories and Liberal Unionists) sitting down beside Mr. John Redmond and his parliamentary followers. It was found possible, in framing proposals fraught with moral, social, and educational results, to secure the common agreement of the Rev. Dr. Kane, Grand-Master of the Belfast Orangemen, and of the eminent Jesuit educationalist, Father Thomas Finlay, of the Royal University. The O'Connor Don, the able chairman of the Financial Relations Commission, and one of Her Majesty's judges, both Unionists, were fairly balanced by the present and two former Nationalist Lord-Mayors of Dublin. Sir John Arnott fitly represented the commercial enterprise of the South, while such men as Mr. Thomas Sinclair, Sir William Ewart, Sir Daniel Dixon, Sir James Musgrave, and Mr. Thomas Andrews would be universally accepted as the highest authorities upon the needs of the community which has made Ulster famous in the industrial world.

The story of our deliberations and ultimate conclusions cannot be set forth here except in the barest outline. We instituted an inquiry into the means by which the government could best promote the development of our agricultural and industrial resources. Failing to get the information we required from official and other publications, we despatched special commissioners to nine countries of Europe\* whose economic conditions and progress might afford some lessons for Ireland. Our funds did not admit of an inquiry in the United States or the Colonies. However, we obtained invaluable information as to the method by which countries which were our chief rivals in agricultural and industrial production, have been enabled successfully to compete with our producers even in our own markets. Our commissioners were instructed in each case to collect the facts necessary to enable us to differentiate the parts played respectively by State aid and the efforts of the people themselves in producing these results. With this information before us, after long and earnest deliberation we came to a unanimous agreement upon the main facts of the situation

\* France, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Wurtemberg, Bavaria, Austria, Hungary and Switzerland. Mr. Michael Mulhall, the well-known statistician, and Mr. Thomas P. Gill who acted as secretary to the committee and rendered invaluable service in that capacity, as well, undertook this mission.

with which we had to deal, and upon the recommendations for remedial legislation we should make to the government.

"We have in Ireland," I am quoting from the report, "a poor country, practically without manufactures—except for the linen and shipbuilding of the north, and the brewing and distilling of Dublin—dependent upon agriculture, with its soil imperfectly tilled, its area under cultivation decreasing, and a diminishing population without industrial habits or technical skill." We sought to prove that this melancholy state of things was not due to racial defects or other unalterable conditions, but was largely attributable to misgovernment in the past. It was not our purpose to criticise, in the light of our present knowledge, the policies of other days, or to indulge in abuse of the present generation of Englishmen for the misdoings of their ancestors. We merely sought to establish a claim for such special treatment as might, without offending against the accepted principles of political economy, or disturbing the fiscal arrangements of the United Kingdom, place our people on the economic level which they would probably have obtained, if England had governed Ireland as well as she governed herself. I think we convinced all with whom the doctrine of *laissez faire* is not carried to the verge of idolatry.

The substance of our recommendations was that a Department of Government should be specially created, with a minister directly responsible to Parliament at its head. The central body was to be assisted by a Consultative Council representative of the interests concerned. The department was to be adequately endowed from the Imperial Treasury, and was to administer State aid to agriculture and industries in Ireland upon principles which were fully described. Those who desire to know the details of this proposal for legislation, and the facts and arguments upon which it was based, must refer to the report, which can easily be obtained.\* I need only say here that the scheme, in its main features, was taken from the institutions of the countries to which our investigations were extended, and modified to meet the requirements of our own case. The amalgamation of agriculture and industries under one department was largely due to the opinion expressed by M. Tisserand, late Director General of Agriculture in France, and

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probably the highest authority in Europe upon the administration of State aid to agriculture. The memorandum which he kindly contributed to the Recess Committee was copied into the annual report of the United States Department of Agriculture for 1896. The creation of a new minister directly responsible to Parliament was a necessary provision. Ireland is at present governed by a number of boards, all, with the one exception of the Board of Works, which is a branch of the Treasury, responsible to the Chief Secretary—practically a whole cabinet in himself—who is supposed to be responsible for them to Parliament. The bearers of this preposterous burden are generally men of great ability, as is the case at the present time. But no Chief Secretary could possibly take under his wing yet another department with the entirely new and important functions now to be discharged. The members of the department were to be nominated by the Executive, since no process of popular election could be counted upon to secure the best men for such administrative work. The Consultative Council, a device which, from continental experience, we were convinced would keep the department in touch with the interests it was created to subserve, was to be largely elective.

The appearance of the report was greeted with a chorus of approval in the press, the perfected scheme meeting with the same public support which had been accorded to the original project. In the last session of Parliament the Chief Secretary introduced a measure, avowedly based, in its main lines, upon the report. The Treasury, however, inserted a provision by which the funds for working the scheme should come out of the Irish instead of the common purse. This made the bill unpopular. But in any case it had little chance of passing into law in the then attitude of a large number of Irish members towards the Recess Committee. Mr. Dillon, who had succeeded Mr. Justin McCarthy in the leadership, and who has opposed the Recess Committee throughout, publicly characterized the report as "idiotic," and accused its author of seeking a salary for himself and jobs for his friends. I can quite understand that, to any one who believes in the sufficiency of political agitation to deal with the Irish problem, such criticism may appear appropriate. In any case, it is rather helpful than the reverse. Meanwhile, public opinion in favor of our recommendations is growing rapidly. On November 30 last, a large deputation rep-

resenting all the leading agricultural and industrial interests of the country waited upon the Irish government, in order to press upon them the urgent need for the new department. The Chief Secretary, after describing the gathering as "one of the most notable deputations which has ever come to lay its case before the Irish government," and noting the "remarkable growth of public opinion" in favor of the policy embodied in his bill of last session, expressed his heartfelt sympathy with the case which had been presented, and his earnest desire—which is well known—to proceed with his policy of agricultural and industrial development at the earliest moment. But his hands are tied. The demand made upon the government is, in a qualitative sense, already irresistible. But economic agitation of this kind takes time to become numerically powerful. You cannot get backward producers to agitate for the legislation I have described, any more than you can get schoolboys to clamor for a more advanced curriculum. We are, however, moving along, and whatever delay the exigencies of party politics may prescribe, I claim for those who gave their work and time to its deliberations, that the Recess Committee has already been a powerful influence for good, and has justified its existence.

I now pass to the other side of the new movement, which is in no sense political. In seeking remedial legislation, the Recess Committee did not fall into the error of placing undue reliance on the efficacy of State aid. Those who read the report will see that they rely mainly upon self-help, and insist throughout that the government should be careful to intervene in such a manner as to evoke and supplement, but not provide a substitute for, this essential quality.

They recognize also that this self-help must be organized in order to fulfil its purpose. This is the teaching alike of countries mainly agricultural, such as Denmark; of those mainly industrial, such as Würtemberg; and of those largely agricultural and industrial, such as France and Belgium. The government always seeks to work with and through local associations. Even in schemes of practical education, local initiation, local contribution, and local control are generally made the condition precedent of monetary and other assistance from the central authority. Undoubtedly this principle must be observed if governmental interference is not to degenerate into jobbery and waste.

It will surprise most of those who read this article to hear that this principle is finding wide acceptance among the farmers of Ireland. During the past eight years a movement which has for its object the uplifting of the rural community, economically first, and then socially and intellectually, has been quietly but actively promoted by a few enthusiasts. The programme of these reformers is based on the principle of voluntary association for industrial purposes, an agency which, in addition to its economic advantages, has proved, wherever it has been tried, to be productive of most beneficial effects upon the character of the individual.

Practical effect was to be given to this principle by the establishment of societies of farmers on lines well known in many European countries, notably in Denmark, where such organizations are to be found in every parish. Ireland, of course, needs diversified manufactures, reliance upon a single industry not being a desirable condition. But Irish statistics, which show that the vast majority of the people are dependent, directly or indirectly, upon the land, point clearly to the advancement of agriculture as the first step in economic progress. Moreover, a class possessing the habits and methods of industry is a prime necessity in the successful promotion of manufacturing enterprise. Such a class can be created in Ireland only out of the agricultural community, and industrially educated in connection with the industry with which it is familiar. *Festina lente* was the motto of these men.

The history of this work might be interesting, more especially as the problem with which it deals is very nearly related to a problem now coming to the front in the United States, which I may seek an opportunity to discuss on another occasion. I can now only say that after a period of constant and apparently fruitless toil the farming societies began to struggle into existence. In the spring of 1894 a considerable amount of public interest in these efforts was aroused, and a society called the Irish Agricultural Organization Society, as widely representative as the Recess Committee, was formed to provide funds for carrying on the movement, which had then grown to such proportions that it could no longer be promoted by the original volunteers. Owing to the influence of this philanthropic association we have to-day some 170 of these societies in Ireland scattered throughout thirty-

one of the thirty-two counties, with an aggregate membership of some 17,000.

These societies variously embrace every branch of the farming industry. They cheapen production by the joint purchase of seeds, manures, implements, machinery, and other requirements of their industry. In dairying districts they erect creameries, which they show a capacity to operate for their own profit. They jointly sell what they produce with a view to saving middle profits. They are in many districts applying the principle of co-operation to agricultural finance, and are thus securing a great reduction of interest upon farm loans. The advantages derived from combination of individuals is enhanced by joint action between societies. The societies are generally prosperous, the percentage of commercial failures being practically nominal.

Such is a rough outline of the purely economic movement which preceded and rendered possible its semi-political complement, the Recess Committee. I believe that the full development of agricultural organization points the only way by which the agricultural industry in Ireland can be saved. The Irish farmers, who formerly had to compete only with their fellow-workers in the United Kingdom, are now brought into competition with the farmers of the whole world. The time has come when they must intelligently apply to their industry those methods of combination which have been resorted to by those engaged in every other industrial undertaking, and by farmers of other countries. The system by which we are seeking to attain this result has already proved its economic soundness; and it is only lack of funds sufficient to send organizers qualified [to educate bodies of farmers, who are ready to listen to them in almost every parish in Ireland, in its principles and procedure, which delays its universal adoption. May I point out that in providing the sinews of war a splendid opportunity is open for some wealthy lover of Ireland to confer upon her people an incalculable boon?

I am quite aware that I throw myself open to adverse criticism on the part of more ardent politicians on both sides of the great dividing line. On the one hand, I shall be told that the settlement of the land question is immeasurably more important than the attempt to bolster up an industry hopelessly handicapped by landlordism. I cannot now deal with that argument, but **must ask my readers** to withhold judgment until they have

studied, at least in outline, the drastic land legislation of the last quarter of a century, and have realized the present legal status of the Irish tenant. They will probably come to the conclusion that rent is no longer the chief factor in cost of production, and that the need of the day is a system of organized self-help supplemented by State aid. On the other hand, I may be told that I fail to be duly grateful for the noble work—and such it was—of Mr. Arthur Balfour in the west of Ireland, and that I am unreasonable in pressing for further State aid while other Irish affairs are before Parliament. I can only reply that the best way to help Ireland is to aid in developing her resources, and that of these by far the most important are those which exist in the people themselves. The annual exodus of Irishmen from Ireland still appeals eloquently to the government to develop something besides our politics.

One criticism of a more general character remains. I shall be told that those of us who are trying to turn the minds of our countrymen from purely political to economic reforms take no account of Irish sentiment, and show a profane disregard for the national aspirations. Our answer is broadly this. While we do not consider it un-Irish to be practical, we are quite aware that without sentiment on our side we can exercise no influence for good upon our fellow-countrymen. So let us be known by our fruit. I believe our chief offence is that we despise that so-called love for Ireland which is but a thinly disguised hatred for England. Our hopes for the regeneration of our country do not involve the destruction of an empire which Irishmen have taken a leading part in building up, and are to-day foremost in maintaining.\* Such a perverted patriotism is alien to the character of the Irish people, who are neither revengeful nor wanting in intelligence.

It may be that independence of thought upon the Irish question will still subject a man to a storm of obloquy. I am, however, convinced that nothing but good can come from a frank and unreserved expression in America of opinions upon the Irish question which have not there been heard before.

HORACE PLUNKETT.

\* The names of Irish empire-builders in the past are too numerous to cite. The services of Lords Wolseley and Roberts on land, of Lord Charles Beresford on water, and of Lord Dufferin in diplomacy, are among the latest instances of the preëminence of Irishmen in imperial affairs.